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COMMUNICATING WITH THE POOR

This paper has two primary objectives. The first is to summarize the results of a study of the general informational search behavior of a sample of 350 low-income households in St. Louis in August 1968.[1] In this study data were gathered on the types of information ordinarily sought, the sources of information used, and the relative importance that the poor themselves place on the various sources prior to making product selections in the marketplace. The second major objective of this paper is to try to place these findings in the broader context of communicating with the poor generally.

As part of the second objective attention will be given to considering the neighborhood information center as a possible contributor to this communication process. Initially, however, it should be helpful to put the whole subject of communicating with the poor in a proper setting by spending some time on a brief review of the communication process itself, i.e., to lay a theoretical basis for further examination of the theme of the article.

THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS: A THEORETICAL BASE

The term communication comes from the Latin *communis* which means common. This suggests that commonness is a fundamental aspect of the process of communicating. But before developing this further, it is appropriate to identify three key elements or parts of the process: source, message, and destination.[2]

The source is the originator of the message. It may be an individual or a group. The message is merely a signal capable of being interpreted meaningfully. It may be in one of many forms—ink on paper, sound waves in the air, or a wave of the hand. The destination is the designated receiver of a message. And, of course, the destination may be an individual or a group listening, watching or reading.

Simply stated, the communication process involves two basic actions on the part of participants. These are the actions of encoding and decoding. Encoding is putting the message in communicable form (i.e., into a form that can be transmitted). Decoding is translating

the signal received into an understandable form. The major elements just identified may be shown in Figure 1.[3]

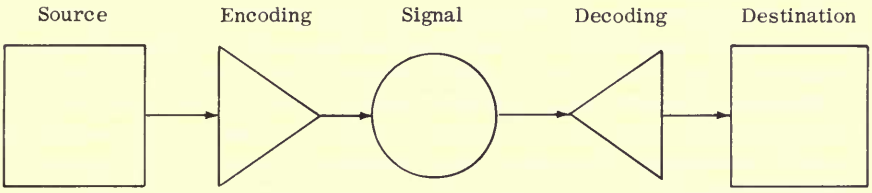

Fig. 1. Communication Model

It is always important to keep in mind that there are a number of constraints that operate on this system. For instance, a system like this will have a maximum capacity for handling information, and this of course will depend on the separate capacities of each unit in the channel.[4]

One very critical operative constraint deals with the "fields of experience" of both the source and the destination. This issue again brings to light the concern about *communis*, i.e., commonness. It really addresses the question of whether those involved in the act of trying to communicate are in tune. Certainly the tuning dimension is quite clear when thought is given to the case of a radio transmitter and receiver, but it is somewhat more complicated when it means that a human receiver must be able to understand a human sender. Figure 2 illustrates this point.

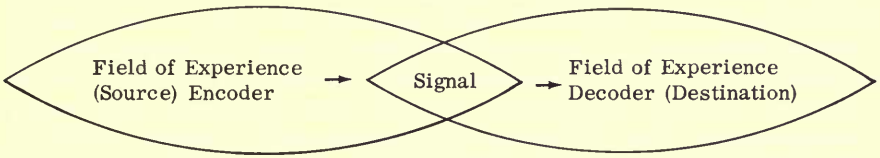

Fig. 2. Common Areas of Experience

The two largest areas of the figure represent the accumulated experience of the two individuals or groups trying to communicate with each other. The source can encode, and the destination can decode, only in terms of the experiences each has had. Therefore, if the areas do not meet—if there has been no common experience—then communication is impossible. If there is only a small common area, it is going to be very difficult to get an intended meaning from one to

the other.[5] It should be a major objective of the source to encode in such a way as to make it easy for the destination to decode in the message, i.e., to relate the message to his experience which is much like that of the source.

To a large extent, the mass middle class American society and its bureaucratic organizations have a substantially different field of experience than the poor of this country. The poor are not simply middle class Americans with less money. They have a different life style—possibly what Oscar Lewis called a "culture of poverty."[6] Before discussing the subject of communicating with the poor, an explicit attempt must be made to identify and characterize the poor as they will be treated here. This will establish a necessary commonness between the author and the audience regarding the subjects of this article.

THE POOR

WHO ARE THEY?

Poverty can be treated in absolute or relative terms; that is, families or individuals may be considered poor relative to the rest of the population or so classified on the basis of their lack of possession of these approaches would result in classifying many of the same assets. In this country today, using reasonable standards with either of these approaches, would result in classifying many of the same people as poor. In general, however, the absolute approach to defining poverty is preferred and, therefore, is used here.

Most attempts to define poverty in an absolute way have primarily been concerned with some "necessary" amount of income—necessary, that is, to command a minimum quantity of selected goods and services. This concern was even implicit in some of our earliest public attempts at pinpointing poverty in America. For instance, this emphasis is evident in a phrase used by Franklin D. Roosevelt in his inaugural address of January 1937: "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished." It is explicit in the definition now used in the war on poverty. These standards have become thresholds of poverty.[7]

The thresholds used have been officially determined by the Council of Economic Advisers in conjunction with the Social Security Administration and the Department of Agriculture. Operationally a family is considered poor today if its income is less than three times the cost of the food needed to feed its members at a very modest level. The specific food needs have been determined by the Department of Agriculture and figured in current dollars. This simple operating procedure was adopted because it was easy to apply and because historically families in the lowest income range typically have spent approximately one-third of their income on food.[8]

Today, a family of four with an annual income below $4,000 would officially be considered poor. However, we must keep in mind that a sizable and articulate school of thought argues that non-income factors are the significant ones. Perhaps Oscar Lewis, who originated the term culture of poverty, Michael Harrington, whose book on *The Other America* was so instrumental in awakening Americans to the evils of poverty, and John Kenneth Galbraith with his work, *The Affluent Society*, are the leading voices here. "These observers [among others] characterize people as poor when they live in ghettos, feel antagonistic toward the police, lack political power, have inferior public services . . . are discriminated against . . . and are generally unable to participate in the so-called mainstream of American life."[9]

In 1968, using the economic threshold approach to defining poverty, there were 25.4 million Americans who were poor.[10] This figure is the result of a decline over the previous several years of between 1 and 2 million a year. However, between 1969 and 1970 the number of poor increased by 5.1 percent.[11]

Contrary to what many think, the poor are not a homogeneous group despite their sharing a common experience of economic deprivation.[12] Every kind of American is represented among the poor, including those in families headed by a white, Anglo-Saxon male in the prime working age group and employed full time. Nevertheless, the incidences of poverty vary sharply among different kinds of people living under certain circumstances.

Although more than two-thirds of the poor in this country are white, nearly 34 percent of the Black population lives in poverty. If a person is Black his chances of being poor are about three times greater than those of a white person. Furthermore, there are a number of other groups whose poverty incidence is substantially higher than average. These include the aged, families with female heads, large families and families living in the rural south as well as those living in the central cities. Of course, these categories are not mutually exclusive, and any person who is in more than one of these classes has that much more chance of being poor.[13]

Despite these and other dimensions of deprivation which demonstrate something less than perfect uniformity within the ranks of the poor, there are identifiable similarities. And after a cautious warning about too much generalization regarding likenesses among the poor, the emphasis must be placed on several clusters of similarities which can be used to help develop organizational strategies for servicing the local residents of a depressed area.

What follows is an attempt to identify some of the characteristics that people of the low-income areas typically have in common. Included is an identification of some servicing implications these similarities offer neighborhood information centers.

LIFE STYLES

The day-to-day behavioral patterns of the lower socio-economic classes can be characterized by several distinctive themes, all of which are apparently related to a deprived, alienated position in society. These include a strong feeling of fatalism and belief in chance; strong present time orientation and short time perspective; impulsiveness or inability to delay present gratification or to plan for the future; concrete rather than abstract thinking processes and concrete verbal behavior; feelings of inferiority; acceptance of aggression, illegitimacy and authoritarianism.[14] Simplified, the salient themes are fatalism, an orientation to the present, authoritarianism, and concreteness. To a large extent, the behavior of the poor is shaped by these themes.

This behavioral field is substantially different from that of the more general population and, therefore, varied approaches may be required to effectively serve the low-income person or family. For instance, the fatalism of the poor appears to be a result of a genuine powerlessness they experience with respect to so much of their life. They feel controlled by external forces rather than being in control themselves. This attitude acts as a definitive brake on occupational and educational aspirations. It also retards their interest in such critical problems as health care. Then too, it may nurture a tendency to limit the scope of one's participation in "normal" community-oriented organizations such as the PTA, the church and the Boy Scouts.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the unique nature of the neighborhood information center, i.e., a locally based, personally conscious organization, once understood by its constituency, could help alleviate some of the feeling of complete helplessness. If so, this could represent a major contribution to facilitating a significant change in the attitude of the poor. And furthermore, it may be a small catalytic agent in the fight for building human dignity.

An orientation toward the present goes hand in hand with fatalism; that is, the poor generally feel that it is fruitless to pay attention to the distant future or to plan ahead, when fortune and chance are considered its basic determinants. Also, when so much of one's personal resources must be expended simply to survive in the present, there is little time left to consider the future. This predisposition precipitates a lack of interest in planning for future needs and a general feeling of insecurity. As a result, poor families frequently live from one crisis to another.

This behavioral pattern can have various implications for serving the poor. For example, major durables may well be purchased on the basis of a short search experience following the realization of a need—possibly one resulting from the breakdown of an automobile, or

the seeking of medical care only after a family member has become incapacitated. The need to replace such an item or gain immediate medical attention, coupled with other constraints on search behavior, will frequently hold the poor in their neighborhood.

Evidence from several studies shows that variation in personal aspects of customer servicing is particularly important in gaining the patronage of the poor. For example, both Rainwater and Caplovitz discovered a noticeable discomfort was felt by working class women shopping in downtown stores because of the clerks' apparent lack of empathy toward the problems of the less affluent.[15]

A third theme by which the poor live is that of authoritarianism. Generally this is a belief in strength as the source of authority and in the rightness of existing systems. This perspective in part appears to arise from limiting mundane life experiences to which those living in poverty have become accustomed and also from the constant subordination of the poor to the rest of society.

The final life theme mentioned is that of concreteness. This involves placing greater emphasis on material goods than on intellectual concepts. It has evolved quite logically among a group of people preoccupied by material problems—such as keeping a roof over their heads and food on the table.

Concreteness becomes evident in verbal patterns, in the distrust of intellectualism, and in occupational values. As a result, the life of the poor includes fewer generalizations, relies less on the conceptual process than on observation, and is more tied to the world of immediate happenings and momentary sensations. In a purchase experience, such an orientation may lead to placing most importance on the breadth of product features, convenience of operation, and brand name, rather than on more long-run considerations including durability, economy of use, and frequency of repair.[16]

Now that several key dimensions of poverty have been identified and some inferences made, attention will be turned to specific evidence concerning communicating with the poor.

THE ST. LOUIS STUDY

Human communication is most appropriately studied in some specific context; that is, one finds it most convenient to study the transmission and reception of information via various channels regarding some definite subject field. As suggested earlier, the context used for analyzing the topic of communicating with the poor is a market environment with attention drawn specifically to the availability and use of consumption-facilitating information. This context is particularly appropriate because most of the facets of poverty have been discussed in terms of economic deprivation. Therefore, this section is framed in an economic context.

PREPURCHASE INFORMATION SOUGHT

It may be surprising that when the poor are asked what information they feel they should have and would therefore seek before purchasing a large item such as a television set, they respond similarly to the model of economic man in search of product information. However, there is much less evidence of their recognition of a specific need for the accumulation of dealer-oriented knowledge. This latter finding may reflect the limited flexibility that the poor have with respect to dealer choice. Such constraints on their shopping scope are exemplified by the fact that only 23 percent (see Appendix for sampling procedure) of the St. Louis households had access to an automobile and 42 percent stated that they were limited to shopping within walking distance of their homes.[17] Nearly identical restrictions were found by Alexis, *et al.*, in their study of determinants of food-buying patterns in Rochester.[18]

Three times as many requests for product-oriented information were offered by the St. Louis respondents as were given for dealer-oriented data. Information most frequently sought includes whether the product was guaranteed, its price—including some indication as to the appropriateness of the price at the time—and the best brands available. The information which appears to be the least important to these consumers includes other people's experience with local dealers, reputation of the various dealers, and prices at various stores. The nine categories of information that they say they should have before making a large purchase are listed in order of the magnitude of interest.

TABLE 1

PREPURCHASE INFORMATION SOUGHT BY THE POOR

Information sought	Percent of respondents making request*	Product or dealer orientation
Product guarantee	50	Product
Product pricing information including: how much does it cost, is there a sale on and/or is the price right now?	42	Product
Best brands available	34	Product
New or used	32	Product

TABLE 1: CONTINUED

Information sought	Percent of respondents making request*	Product or dealer orientation
Credit terms available including: down payment, weekly payments and interest charges	23	Dealer
Service available	16	Dealer
Prices at various stores	5	Dealer
Reputation of the various dealers	3	Dealer
Other people's experience with local dealers	1	Dealer

*Totals more than 100 percent because multiple responses were given.

One might legitimately ask if their oral responses coincide with their overt market behavior. In the St. Louis project there was no way of accurately determining this. However, in a separate study concerning consumer reaction to unit pricing information conducted in Columbia, Missouri in 1971, support was gained for the St. Louis findings. In the Columbia study the highest correlation was found between low per-unit price and high sales volume in the two stores which have the largest proportion of low-income household patronage of any supermarkets in the trading area; that is, although consumers with the lowest incomes usually purchase the major proportion of their food in only one store,[19] they are most consistent in purchasing the least expensive items within the five generic product categories studied.[20]

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Given the general plight observed in this depressed section of St. Louis, one might ask a very basic question: To what extent is the social and economic deprivation of ghetto residents reflected in their contact with the consumer market? For instance, are these people as deprived of information ordinarily available through the mass media concerning the selection of goods and services as they are of the goods and services themselves?

The results of this study indicate that the mass media do reach the urban poor. However, this does not mean that they have as much

access to various types of information as do most people, nor does it imply that the messages they receive through the traditional channels of communication are in the most usable form for them. What does seem evident is that to achieve optimum effectiveness in communicating with these people, one must understand their media exposure patterns and their information usage patterns.

Gross Media Exposure Patterns (Broadcast Media)—Ownership of radio and television sets is at a high level even among very low-income households. Nevertheless, the 84.1 percent rate of radio ownership and the 83.5 percent television ownership level found here are still approximately 10 percent below the national average.

Although the instances of radio and television ownership in the inner city of St. Louis are almost identical, the respective listening and viewing patterns are quite different. Slightly more than 70 percent of those interviewed claimed that they were regular television viewers while only 58.3 percent showed similar regularity in their radio listening habits.

Program interest patterns showed considerable variation between the two broadcast media. As was anticipated, radio drew most attention as a source of music and secondly as a means of keeping informed on news, weather and sports. Only incidental interest was expressed in other radio programming. Interest in television programming was concentrated in four groupings. The greatest interest was in soap operas with 24 percent of the 246 regular television viewers mentioning that they watch this type of program often. News, weather and sports followed closely behind as did interest in adventure programs (excluding Westerns) and comedy programs.

Gross Media Exposure Patterns (Print Media)—Despite the fact that the total reach of the print media in this low-income area is less than that of radio and television, its reach is still substantial. Nearly two-thirds of these St. Louis residents read or at least look at a newspaper almost every day with about 40 percent claiming to read at least one magazine every week. This is identical to the level of newspaper readership discovered by Sargent and Stempel among thirty-nine welfare recipients in Athens, Ohio.[21] However, it is substantially higher than the 14 percent readership level which Allen found in his Pittsburg study.[22]

One discouraging discovery made with respect to the use of printed sources of information is that nearly 40 percent of those interviewed said that they either did not read at all (7.2 percent) or read less than one hour per week (31.8 percent). In effect this means that these people are almost completely cut off from a wealth of information. In addition, only 20 percent of those contacted read eight hours or more per week (i.e., more than an hour per day average).

Relative Media Effectiveness—Based on the results of this study, television and newspapers are the two most effective modes of communication for reaching the ghetto poor. Both of these forms of mass media have high rates of exposure and involvement among those interviewed. It will be recalled that over 70 percent of the respondents claimed that they were regular television viewers and approximately two-thirds of the respondents read or at least look at a newspaper almost every day.

Newspapers and television were also listed as the two most useful sources in helping these individuals choose a product, i.e., helping them to get the most for their money. And, although personal contact may appear to be a very desirable means of communicating with these economically deprived people, they themselves do not place as high a value on this type of exchange as one might expect. In fact, when given a hypothetical situation regarding the purchase of a major appliance, over 60 percent said that they would not ask anyone for advice before buying such an item. These people consider newspapers the best single source of product information with television the next best source. Advice from friends followed television as a source of product information while radio was ranked fourth, store window signs fifth, advice from sales clerks sixth, and magazines seventh. Advice from social workers was considered the least desirable source of such information.

These results do not correspond with what Udell found in his study of a more heterogeneous group of Madison, Wisconsin, appliance purchasers. Of the sources just mentioned, Udell's respondents listed discussion with friends as most helpful; newspaper advertising and then television followed. Magazines were ranked fourth, advice from store contacts (i.e., telephone calls) fifth, and radio advertising was considered the least helpful.[23]

Another component of relative media effectiveness is the relationship between the various media exposure patterns of these people. For instance, some might expect that a heavy television viewing habit among low-income persons would interfere with their reading and vice versa. In investigating these kinds of relationships several discoveries were made; the most important follow.

First, using a chi-square test of independence with a .05 level of significance, it was found that there is a relationship between the number of hours that a person spends watching television and his newspaper readership. However, it is contrary to the relationship hypothesized in the previous paragraph; that is, the evidence obtained in this study shows that those who watch little or no television are less likely to read newspapers than the moderate to heavy television viewers.

It was also discovered that there is a significant relationship between general magazine readership and the number of hours spent

viewing television. Again, those who watch little or no television are less likely to read magazines than those who have a greater exposure to television. No such relationship was found between radio listening habits and either magazine or newspaper readership. Neither was a significant relationship discovered between radio listening and television viewing behavior.

What may be evident here are two forms of environmental consciousness. One group of individuals seems to have a relatively broad cosmopolitan orientation as expressed by its interest in reading and its viewing behavior. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that there is a significant level of personal physical involvement on the part of these individuals on such a broad scale, but this contact with the mass media is one recognized prerequisite to eliciting their physical participation.[24] The environmental consciousness of the other group is more local in its reference. This latter group's environmental sphere would appear to be limited to its immediate neighborhood–an orientation which is more typical of the lower social class.[25]

The Relationship between Search Behavior and Selected Demographic Variables—Two demographic variables, race and education, are singled out for attention to illustrate the varied behavioral patterns of the poor. Analysis along both of these dimensions substantiates that distinguishable subgroups can be identified for meaningful study.

Race—Variation in prepurchase search patterns is related to racial differences among the respondents in several instances. Two of these occurrences deal with the respondents' association with certain specific communication vehicles, e.g., particular magazines. The other two concern respondent attitudes toward various forms of the mass media in general.

Specifically, from the St. Louis study it seems reasonable to conclude that low-income Blacks are attracted to Negro-oriented media as sources of product information, but not to the exclusion of other forms of the mass media. Both Negro magazines and Negro radio programs have drawn the attention of significant numbers of the poor Blacks of St. Louis. For example, 16 percent of the Black interviewees claim to read some Negro-oriented magazine almost every week; *Ebony* specifically drew the attention of 12.6 percent of these Black respondents. However, general interest, essentially white-oriented magazines such as *Life*, *Reader's Digest* and *Look* were mentioned by 10.5 percent of the Negroes. And there was a similar pattern evident in Negro radio listening behavior. Larson also found this pattern in radio listening among Chicago Negroes.[26]

The respondents' personal identification with the media is another point in the study where racial differences appeared. The white

respondents favored the impersonal sources to a larger extent than did the Negroes. Even though both racial groups placed newspapers and television at the top of their respective lists of helpful sources, advice from friends ranked third among the Negro respondents as the most useful source, while this source was ranked sixth by the white group. Nearly 24 percent of the Blacks mentioned personal sources in general as the most useful in providing product information, while only about 15 percent of the white respondents mentioned such sources. Of these personal sources, the white people favored advice from social workers almost exclusively, while the Negroes considered advice from friends much more important than advice from either social workers or salesclerks. The conclusion that Blacks place greater emphasis on personal sources is consistent with results of Greenberg and Dervin's study of the poor in Lansing, Michigan.[27]

In regard to attitudes toward advertising, the Black respondents in the St. Louis study were much more favorably inclined toward broadcast advertising than the white subjects. Respondents were asked, "What do you think of most radio and television commercials—would you say in general they are entertaining, informative or annoying?" Approximately 27 percent of the white people answered entertaining or informative, while nearly 58 percent of the Negroes responded with one or the other of these positive connotations. These latter findings are consistent with those of Bogart[28] as well as the results of a survey conducted by Roper Associates in April 1968.

Education—The importance of formal education permeates the findings of the entire study. Among other things, the best educated poor earn more money than their less educated counterparts, are more perceptive in their role as consumers and generally appear to lead a somewhat more comfortable life in this depressed area.[29] The more pertinent findings concerning the relationship of education to the search behavior of these low-income people are now presented.

Again, to illustrate the divergent behavioral patterns that can be observed among the poor, specific findings will be examined. Here particular attention will be given to the relationship between formal education and the sources of product information considered most helpful by the poor.

As stated earlier, two sources of product information emerge generally as the most helpful—newspapers and television. Although six other sources were mentioned, these two received the most emphasis from the respondents. Nevertheless, there is a significant relationship between the number of years of formal education completed and the informational sources these respondents find most helpful in their prepurchase search experience. A more complete picture of the variation in views regarding the different sources can

be seen if the population studied is divided into three groups representing three levels of educational attainment as follows: completion of grade school or less, completion of no more than junior high school, and completion of at least some high school. Table 2 summarizes these findings.

In five of the eight source categories, specific trends of importance become evident when related to the levels of education. First, the broadcast media, i.e., radio and television, are considered more helpful as sources of product information by those with the least formal education than they are by those at each of the succeeding levels. While the importance of broadcast media as a source of prepurchase information decreases as the amount of formal education increases, the very opposite is true for the print media. Both newspapers and magazines are preferred more often as sources of product information by those with at least some high school education than they are by those who only completed junior high, and those with a junior high education consider these print media more helpful than those who only went to grade school.

TABLE 2

HELPFULNESS OF SOURCES OF PRODUCT INFORMATION AND FORMAL EDUCATION COMPLETED

Sources	Percentage completing grade school or less	Percentage completing junior high	Percentage completing at least some high school
Newspapers	(18) 21.4	(21) 23.3	(60) 35.2
Television	(27) 32.1	(23) 25.6	(27) 15.8
Advice from friends	(7) 8.3	(8) 8.9	(23) 13.5
Store window signs	(12) 14.3	(7) 7.8	(18) 10.5
Radio	(11) 13.1	(10) 11.1	(11) 6.4
Advice from social workers	(3) 3.5	(8) 8.9	(11) 6.4
Magazines	(1) 1.2	(6) 6.7	(14) 8.1
Advice from salesclerks	(3) 3.5	(6) 6.7	(6) 3.5
Do not know	(2) 2.5	(1) 1.1	(1) 0.6
Total	(84) 100%	(90) 100%	(171) 100%
N = 345			

Although few researchers would deny that radio and television can be helpful in supplying consumers with some product information and in arousing their interest, the instantaneous nature of broadcasted messages prohibits close scrutiny and provides only a limited data base for comparison of competing product features. What this implies is that the least well equipped of these ghetto dwellers are the most likely to rely on sources of product information that provide few opportunities for them to make accurate comparisons of critical decision variables such as price.

In the section that follows, specific attention is given to the neighborhood information center (NIC) and the role such an organization might play in facilitating the flow of information to the poor.

NEIGHBORHOOD INFORMATION CENTERS AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATING WITH THE POOR

World War II thrust hardship on many Englishmen in the form of injuries, homelessness, and loss of loved ones, as well as dislocation and the loss of personal possessions. This was the agonizing and frustrating experience which fostered the first Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB).

These CABs did not offer any direct services, but instead simply served as a means of bringing some order to what appeared to be utter confusion. Information was offered quickly and conveniently to anyone in need. The CAB made certain that people did not miss out on aid from various social agencies just because they were unaware of its availability.

This information and referral service proved so successful that it was continued after the war, and today there are over 450 such units in England.[30] However, it must be clearly understood that the CAB began as a function and then became an organization.[31] Those concerned with meeting such social needs in this country would do well to recognize this development and separate their analysis into two parts: (1) identification of the critical information needs of the populace that they are most concerned with, and (2) determination of how these needs can best be met. One is ill advised to start with a formal organization such as a welfare agency, church, or library, although these institutions can be efficient catalysts in a dynamic, complex society to show personal concern and to bring needy people and services together. Understanding the informational needs of the poor must be a prerequisite to the development of a system for delivering the appropriate information.

As a way of concluding, several personal observations are offered with respect to the establishment of such a delivery system aimed at effectively reaching the poor.

1. In servicing the poor any information agency in this country should not limit its mode of operation to person-to-person contact as the CABs do generally. As mentioned earlier, the mass media reach a substantial number of poor people and, of equal importance, many have confidence in these impersonal sources. Therefore, it is reasonable to give serious consideration to using such channels for disseminating information that has wide appeal to the poor. By these means large numbers of disadvantaged people can be reached at a fraction of the cost of personal contacts.

   These efforts might take the form of spot announcements on radio or entire programs devoted to subjects of critical interest to the local constituency. To maximize the reach of these efforts, provisions may have to be made so that broadcast time or newspaper space is purchased rather than depending on stations or publishers to donating them. Donated space rarely coincides with periods offering maximum audience exposure.
2. CAB experience suggests that an information center should not stereotype its service, i.e., should not indicate that the service provided is "exclusively for the poor." If such an approach were used, one should expect about as much success as a specialty store using the promotional theme "clothing for fat people."
3. The needs of the poor are multidimensional and vary through time. Therefore, the scope of a neighborhood information center will be most successful if its breadth of informational coverage matches these needs. In this context a neighborhood information center (NIC) may best be characterized as a compensatory agency, i.e., providing information that most Americans may well have or not need but which the poor are unable to obtain and which is vital to their day-to-day existence.
4. A great deal of evidence shows that the poor are generally less mobile than other socio-economic groups. This evidence, plus that generated by the experience of the CABs in England, supports the concept of providing neighborhood facilities with convenience of location and servicing atmosphere as key considerations.

   This concept can be expanded to include what might be called "total localization" of service, e.g., taking heed of the servicing problems identified by Rainwater and Caplovitz with respect to the lower socio-economic classes' inability to relate to clerks in many stores outside their immediate neighborhood.[15] Therefore, it would make sense to staff centers in predominantly Black areas with Black professionals and/or volunteers. Furthermore, this type of variation in ethnic patterns may require a different emphasis on the channels used to reach the neighborhood residents. As pointed out previously, Blacks of the inner-city area of St. Louis were more likely to seek information from personal sources than were the white residents of the same area. This may

mean that a special outreach service would be particularly beneficial. Such an approach was found to be quite successful in servicing certain needs of the poor in Kansas City. The University of Missouri Extension Service in Kansas City has trained neighborhood residents to go into the homes of other poor families and to aid them with their homemaking problems.

5. There is a temptation to make centers two-way channels for information and thereby also supply the general public with a close-up picture of the local neighborhood. However, CAB experience shows that when personal problems are shared with a center's staff, these are best kept confidential. In fact, historically, little recordkeeping has been undertaken by the CABs except for the broad categorization of requests for information. Of course, to a large extent this mode of operation limits most ongoing attempts to measure the success of NICs work except for the reliance on some gross representation of the total contacts made by its personnel and the messages that may have gone out via the mass media. It appears, however, that confidentiality should be above recordkeeping if the neighborhood patrons are to be convinced that their interests are of central concern.

   It will be recalled that the poor are most likely to think in terms of present needs and probably are unable to give much attention to future requirements. Few would understand that recording their experiences with NIC personnel would accrue to their long-term benefit. They would be more likely to perceive this as another means used by the establishment to monitor their behavior—similar to their suspicion of social workers.

6. In realizing that the poor live by different themes than most economically middle and upper class people, one finds that this nurtures different predispositions toward various life issues such as illegitimacy. Therefore, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that moralizing or intellectualizing as part of the communication process will most likely fail and possibly alienate the NIC from the neighborhood residents. It also supports the strategy of using simple, believable, straightforward messages, i.e., attempt to deliver in concrete everyday terms information that is asked for or perceived to be needed.

   Such an effort is under way in Philadelphia where the apparent failure and irrelevance of traditional library services in the inner city encouraged the Free Library of Philadelphia to initiate an innovative informational service. Here trained telephone operators, using a computer-based data bank, are able to link some 283,000 people with over 3,000 services in such fields as health, employment, education, housing, and legal and consumer aid to provide fundamental information on how to meet everyday life situations which press upon the people of this ghetto area. The

result is that a fragmented social service delivery system has a chance of being integrated and made substantially more effective. The Free Library's current project is a part of a cooperative plan with the Philadelphia Model Cities Program.[32]

7. One should not expect more from the NIC than is reasonably possible. Communicating critical information to the poor can be important as a catalyst in facilitating personal progress, but it is only one element in a matrix of needs. It is not a panacea. For example, Brooklyn Public Library's "Read Your Way Up" theme could hardly be believable to people who typically have been victims of the vicious poverty cycle for a generation.

   One article describing the Brooklyn program suggested that "They [the poor] can read their way up to a better job, more comfortable living conditions, more value for the dollar, and a larger role in community life."[33] However hopeful we might be, this just is not so and, therefore, should not be promised.

Some students of the NIC suggest that the library has little to offer in the formulation of such centers. For instance, in an extensive Columbia University study,[34] libraries are never mentioned as appropriate institutions to participate in the development of the U. S. counterpart to the British CAB. In the minds of many the library is an intellectual gymnasium that enjoys an image of being a stuffy, solemn institution more interested in protecting its collection than dispensing information. If the library is to participate in such a venture, it will certainly find the challenge a significant one.

APPENDIX

Sampling Procedure

The definitive geographic area within the inner city where the sampling would be done was established with the cooperation of the St. Louis Planning Commission. At the time, the city had recently completed a city-wide study of property value as part of the St. Louis Community Renewal Program. Based upon the commission's experience, a set of boundaries was drawn representing an area which included the greatest concentration of low-income households.

Fifty-five city blocks within the designated area were randomly selected for the survey. Interviewer quotas were then established with respect to two key variables: age and income. Half of the sample were to be under thirty-five years old and all of the sample households were to have annual incomes of $4,000 or less. These two

variables plus race have been identified by other researchers as being particularly influential in shaping the life style of the poor.[35] A quota could have been established to assure a predetermined racial mix in the sample; however, it was decided that the random selection of the city blocks described above would provide sufficiently for the racial variable. As a result, 17 percent of the interviewees were white while 83 percent were Black.

Although a $4,000 limit was placed on household annual income, in retrospect, many of the respondents were members of households which had considerably lower income. The average annual household income among those surveyed was $2,382 or approximately $608 per household member.

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